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DAMASCUS FOR RCO MARY ELLEN HICKEY

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SUBJECT: Beywatch: American Passports and African Development?

¶1. INTRODUCTION: This report is one of a series drafted by Post's entry level officers which have the "Beywatch" caption. We believe the perspectives offered in the following vignette will give the reader a sense of everyday life in Tunisia. For more information about Tunisia or the Embassy Tunis' Entry Level Officer Development initiative, see our Siprnet website. END INTRODUCTION.

¶2. The African Development Bank (ADB) is temporarily headquartered in Tunis, and since its move here in February 2003 has had an impact on life in the city, including the Consular Section at Embassy Tunis. In large part because of the Bank's presence, Embassy Tunis processed non-immigrant visa applications from 75 different nationalities in FY-06, compared to only 46 nationalities in the fiscal year (FY-02) before the Bank relocated from Abidjan. Also, of those 75 nations represented at the visa window in FY-06, 47 percent were sub-Saharan African. (Only 26 percent of FY-02's applicants came from that region of the world.) While the large majority of NIV applicants affiliated with the ADB tend to obtain visas based on their histories of prior travel and strong economic and social ties outside the United States, a surprising number of them have some very close American family bonds.

¶3. For the period between September and November 2006 about 36 percent of Tunisian applicants claimed to have family living in the United States. ("Family" in this cable refers specifically to the close relations enumerated on the DS-156 Application Form, i.e. mother, father, brother, sister, etc.). In contrast, over 61 percent of applicants affiliated with the ADB listed family members living in the United States (These statistics include applicants who are applying for visas unrelated to their family's presence in America, such as official or student visas.)

¶4. Somewhat surprisingly, many ADB applicants also have U.S. citizen children. A quarter of all NIV applicants associated with the ADB indicated having American children on their application forms. (Note: That means that the number of Tunisians claiming to have any family in the U.S. for any reason is only about 10 percent more than the number of ADB employees with Amcit kids.) According to the American Cooperative School of Tunis, about 20 percent of the students paid for by the ADB are holders of an American passport. A look at Embassy Tunis' warden rolls shows 92 Americans registered as ADB affiliates, with over half of those registrants under the age of ¶18. (Note: There are only two USG-employed Americans with school-age children assigned to the Bank.)

¶5. At first glance, these statistics seem to indicate a paradox: Because of their frequent travel and socioeconomic stability, ADB staff members are routinely granted U.S. visitor visas, and with much higher issuance rates than their compatriots back home. (For example, Embassy Tunis refused only about 10 percent of its Nigerian applicants in FY-06, while CG Lagos refused about 59 percent. While Tunis refused 4 percent of Gambian applicants in FY-06, Embassy Banjul refused 72 percent.) Of course, ADB employees tend to represent the wealthier, more educated and more privileged social

groups of their respective nations, thus making it fairly easy to be assured of their proper use of a visa. It's all the more interesting that despite the economic successes that make them good visa cases they continue to seek American passports for their children, and eventually themselves through family immigration petitions.

¶6. It is not uncommon for Conoffs at Embassy Tunis to meet an ADB employee or employee's spouse at the interviewing window who is on her way to the United States to either visit her Amcit children or to bear another one. The ADB routinely pays about 80 percent of childbirth costs for an employee or spouse. Given the financial and legal means to do so, many ADB employees choose to give birth in the United States. With the generally high quality of Tunisian medical care and major European capitals just 2 hours away by plane, it seems clear that the decision to give birth in the United States is not driven by medical concerns, but rather by the draw of our jus soli laws. (Comment: This is not unique to ADB employees; the Consul at an African embassy recently explained to Conoff that his wife traveled to the United States to give birth to both his children so that they could become citizens). ADB families then usually return to the Bank and continue with their lives, often not sending their children to the United States until it's time to go to college or look for jobs. Coming from a part of the world whose beauties are so often overshadowed by political upheaval and economic adversity, perhaps evidence of a quest for that blue passport even by the elite is not such a surprise. But that analysis is the subject for another cable.

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